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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001111

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: NEW JUSTICE MINISTER WHOLEHEARTEDLY  
SUPPORTS SPECIAL TRIBUNAL

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William K. Grant for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) The well-informed new Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar emphasized his commitment to the Special Tribunal, while stressing that he will not be as outspoken as his predecessor, Charles Rizk. He plans to urge other countries for additional financial contributions to the Tribunal. Najjar intends to make his priorities judicial rotations and depoliticizing the ministry.

2. (C) Najjar speculated that the cabinet statement may not be approved within the thirty days stipulated by the constitution, but he was not concerned about this prompting the fall of the new government of PM Siniora. Najjar expressed his appreciation for USG assistance to the Internal Security Forces, saying internal security is of paramount importance. End summary.

WILL PRESS COUNTRIES  
FOR ADDITIONAL TRIBUNAL  
FUNDING

3. (C) In a July 29 courtesy call by Charge Grant, accompanied by PolOff, a meticulous, thoughtful Minister of Justice Ibrahim Najjar expressed strong support for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. "Justice must be achieved," Najjar declared, calling the Special Tribunal an "opportunity to collect evidence on those who have been trying to blow up the country for the last fifty years." Najjar said he wholeheartedly supported the Special Tribunal as a matter of principle and of personal belief.

4. (C) In response to hearing about USG support, Najjar proposed that he would press European and other ambassadors to contribute more when they pay him courtesy calls, and the Charge endorsed his idea. He lamented that some countries, singling out Italy and Russia in particular, are "giving too little" to the Special Tribunal.

5. (C) However, he continued, he will not be outspoken in his support because "(UNIIIC Commissioner) Bellemare needs a cooling off period." (Comment: Najjar was intentionally distancing himself from his predecessor, Charles Rizk, who at times would brazenly criticize the UNIIIC process to the press, putting him at odds with Bellemare. End comment.)

Najjar noted that he had a positive relationship with Bellemare.

FIRST PRIORITY IS  
JUDICIAL ROTATIONS  
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16. (C) Najjar said his first priority as the new justice minister is to complete judicial rotations by "putting the right judges in the right places." He reported that he tasked the Higher Judiciary Council with submitting a proposal on judicial rotations. Expecting to receive the Council's recommendations shortly, Najjar said he will review the proposal and assess its fairness himself. He explained that this was his top priority because he hoped to improve the reputations of the judges, most of whom he believes are fair and competent.

DEPOLITICIZING THE MINISTRY  
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17. (C) Najjar's second goal is to depoliticize the Justice Ministry and court system by sending the message that everyone "must play by the rules." Confessing that he has no interest in a political career, Najjar, who is 67, said he has nothing to gain from accommodating those in the ministry. Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea designated Najjar for the cabinet and "Geagea knows my position and respects it," Najjar said.

CABINET STATEMENT MAY NOT

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BE COMPLETED WITHIN 30-DAY  
DEADLINE  
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18. (C) Speculating that the opposition may not have yet decided whether to reach an agreement on the cabinet statement, Najjar wondered if the Syrians were planning "something else." Noting that the constitution allows for thirty days to approve the cabinet statement, a deadline that would end around August 11, Najjar, appearing unconcerned, predicted that either an agreement will be reached or President Sleiman will forge some sort of compromise. Otherwise, he remarked, "parliament will decide" if the committee charged with drafting the statement should fail. (Note: The constitution does not state what occurs if there is no agreement within thirty days of the cabinet formation. End note.)

APPRECIATIVE OF USG  
ASSISTANCE TO ISF  
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19. (C) Stressing the importance of internal security to Lebanon, Najjar expressed his appreciation for USG assistance to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and requested that the U.S. continue this assistance.  
GRANT